New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1944

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THEATRE OPENINGS

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Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"Bright Boy"

Play by Lt. John Boruff, USNR; directed by Arthur J. Beckhard; settings by Watson Barratt. Presented by Mr. Beckhard and David Merrick at the Playhouse Theatre, March 2, 1944.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
March 3, 1944

'Bright Boy' Opens At the Playhouse

By ROBERT GARLAND

FOR a while last night at the Playhouse it looked as if the news were going to be good today. But as act one changed to act two, my hopes began to fade. And when act two changed to act three, those hopes of mine were dead. I'm sorry; sorry as can be! I did so want to turn in a pleasant piece today. But all I can truthfully tell you is that Broadway's newest play is—promising!

The subject of this sorrowful confession is "Bright Boy," written by Lt. John Boruff, USNR; directed by Arthur Beckhard, designed by Watson Barratt and produced by David Merrick and Mrs. Beckhard in hopeful collaboration.

Starting out as a fresh and entertaining piece about a boys' prep school somewhere in America, "Bright Boy" soon becomes a meandering melodrama about a thief in the dormitory and a stolen watch in the woodbox, winding up with some of the most unethical conclusions I have ever heard. If our halls of learning now condone cheating, lying and stealing, small wonder their pupils are either callous or confused.

• • •

Laughable Larceny

So what might have been a modernized transcription of "Stalky & Co.," or, better still, "The Tennessee Shad," works its way around to a talky and not very interesting mystery play in which the mystery is practically nonexistent. Anybody including dear old drivelly Dr. Sewell, the prep school's head master, could point out the culprit with his eyes shut, his mouth gagged and both hands tied behind him.

Nobody does, however! So act one goes into act two and act two goes into act three, before the naughty boy breaks down and admits to his petty thievery. Even then, he has a hard time convincing his not-so-bright fellow students of his wickedness.

Not that his money-and-watch-lifting really matters. What are two-hundred-and-ten dollars and a gold watch among prep-schoolers? Has not the guilty party loaned their stolen money back to its rightful owners? Has not the stolen watch been found, half-heartedly hidden in a wood box? Has not dear old drivelly Dr. Sewell made a speech, laughing off the larceny? Three cheers for Allen Carpenter—the crook!

• • •

In his role of director, Arthur Beckhard has picked a youthful, personable and talented cast to deal with Lt. Boruff's play. In the opening stanza the boys are ardent and amusing, meeting and re-meeting one another, smoking and talking about sex on the side, hazing the freshmen and yessing the professors. But once the missing money and the wandering watch come on the scene, pop go play and playwright.

Donald Buka does a good job as Allen Carpenter, the poor little rich boy whose laughable larceny motivates three-quarters—the least worthy three-quarters—of the play. He has looks, talent and a first-rate speaking voice. Watch him.

Carleton Carpenter is frequently funny as the scholar known as Shakespeare. So is Eugene Ryan as the scholar known as Pinky. As a matter of simple truth-telling, all the lads are likable, each in his own way. Among the grown-ups on-stage at the Playhouse, Ivan Simpson is as he should be as the doddering Dr. Sewell, and Liam Dunn isn't at all bad as the disillusioned Prof. McGiffin. . . .

At the Playhouse, the boys are brighter than the play.

THE CAST

Tittman (Shakespeare)	Carleton Carpenter
Willie Barnes	Beman Lord
Si Williams	Frank Jacoby
Peterson (Pete)	Jeff Brown
Prof. McGiffin	Liam Dunn
David Bennett	Charles Bowlby
Allen Carpenter	Donald Buka
Stevens (Steve)	John Cushman
John Wallace (Specs)	Michael Dreyfuss
Watts (Sleepy)	William McGuire
Pinky Jenks	Eugene Ryan
Dr. Sewell	Ivan Simpson
Margaret	Joyce Franklin

NEW YORK POST
March 3, 1944

'Bright Boy' Outsmarts the Whole Class in New Prep School Play

By WILELLA WALDORF

LIFE in a boys' prep school is reviewed in some detail in "Bright Boy," presented at the Playhouse last night. The author, John Boruff, is an actor and playwright who is now a lieutenant (JG) in the Navy. Presumably he once attended a school something like Brown Hall, or perhaps he has merely read a collection of books about prep schools. His play contains many familiar fictional ingredients plus a bit of serious talk now and then about the meaning of Democracy, to remind us all that this is 1944 and there's a war on.

Except for a few merry moments in the dormitory, it drags under Arthur J. Beckhard's deliberate direction, winding up in a confusing and long-winded third act that completely dissipates what interest the earlier scenes managed to generate.

Apparently Lieut. Boruff wanted to write something a little different from the usual school-boy formula, but he has succeeded in sticking pretty close to the old story about the brash boy who gets everybody down on him in the beginning, but comes through in the end, to justify the faith of his long-suffering room-mate.

Sudden Change of Front

The Bright Boy is Allen Carpenter, who not only gets wonderful marks but uses his brains to revenge himself on a bunch of rude fellows who tossed him in the lake. Pretending to be a great sport (though seething with rage), he refuses to tattle on the gang to a passing professor and thereupon becomes the hero of the community.

Maybe that's the way things happen in boys' prep schools. Never having attended one, we are in no position to report on the accuracy of this sudden change of front on the part of the riotous youths who threw Allen in the lake. It did strike us, though, that Lieut. Boruff, to make his Bright Boy seem brighter, renders most of his associates uncommonly gullible.

Anyhow, the Bright Boy finally becomes so popular that he's elected president of his class, at which triumphant moment he had anticipated taking his revenge for the lake episode. But even though he had been stealing money all over the dormitory, his loyal room-mate believed in him all the time.

After many complications, it turns out all right in the end, or at any rate that seemed to be the idea. Judging from the sounds of skepticism in the audience, however, not all of those present were prepared to deal as leniently with Bright Boy as the school authorities were.

Donald Buka and Charles Bowlby played the Bright Boy and his room-mate competently, and Ivan Simpson had some amiable moments as the head-master who saw more than he let on. Of the classmates, Michael Dreyfuss was helpful as Specs.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
March 3, 1944

Bright Boy Is a Play of Very Unusual Merit

By BURTON RASCOE

EVERY time, it seems, just when a dispiriting procession of molting and desiccated turkeys, crossing the boards of Broadway on the way to Cain's catacombs, causes you to begin to think the jig is up with the drama and to wonder what has happened to the talent of the playwrights and the brains of the producers, something like Bright Boy, which opened at the Playhouse last night, comes along, unheralded and seemingly out of nowhere, to make you love the theater all over again and entertain joyous hopes for it.

Bright Boy is by no means a great play; but it is a fine entertainment which I earnestly recommend to you as a drama of very unusual merits in the way of comic amusement and serious substance. True enough, it is reminiscent, on the one hand, of Brother Rat and other comedies of that genre and, on the other hand, of Tomorrow the World. It is a drama of the Cause and Cure of a First-Class Heel in a boys' prep school. It tells the story of an American, A Schiklgruber, Jr., who had mentally written his own Mein Kampf in his early teens, and of his come-uppence—the moral lesson being, I take it, that we should cure these potential Hitlers while they are young by outsmarting them with the one weapon against which they have no defense—that of understanding and sympathetic pity.

A Lesson for Youth

If I had a youngster of high school age, Bright Boy is a play I should want him to see; for the phase which the "bright boy" of this play goes through is a phase which, usually in a much lesser degree, every halfway intelligent and imaginative adolescent goes through. It is a phase of callow "cynicism," usually false and assumed as a sort of self-protection against what looks like a hostile world in which one must make one's way. But many a youngster never grows out of it and goes on to become either a criminal whom the law catches up with soon or late or an enormously successful heel in the learned professions, in industry, in finance or in politics—a shrewd and ruthless master of "mass psychology," like Hitler, but rarely so blatantly frank about their methods as Hitler was in Mein Kampf and hence often much honored and highly respected for quite a time by quite a few.

When Allen Carpenter, almost immediately dubbed "Bright Boy" in derision, arrives at Brown Hall, a prep school, he is no gullible greenhorn, because he has been kicked out of half a dozen schools already. Moreover, he is extremely intelligent; he is a linguist, he has traveled a lot; he has had tutors and unusual advantages; and, studious introvert that he is, he has achieved a philosophy of life model on The Prince by Machiavelli and what is more (for many kids at 17 think they are Machiavellians), he acts consistently upon these principles.

Bright Boy Is Ducked

There is a deplorable tendency among the youngsters of American schools and colleges to whittle down all newcomers of special

abilities to their own lowest common denominator of intellect and behavior—to haze them, browbeat them, isolate them and otherwise mistreat them until they conform. They ducked Bright Boy in the lake for being too bright, for being cleverer, better educated, more sophisticated than they, and they did it brutally and with the cowardice of the mobs which indulge in lynchings.

Embittered, Bright Boy plans and executes a Machiavellian revenge; he knows just how to win the boys around with flattery and a false show of good fellowship, good sportsmanship, generosity and beneficence. But to carry out part of his pretense he resorts to theft to finance his ambitions; for he is embittered also because his father, once wealthy, has lost his money and has educated him to triumph by his wits. He is successful even in deceiving his roommate about the purity of his motives and intentions, until their rivalry for the highest honors in the school leads Bright Boy to overstep himself. But, meanwhile, his inner fears, his tragic loneliness have been revealed to his roommate and this has given the latter faith that Bright Boy has goodness in him which can be redeemed.

Played With Great Skill

The drama is played out with great skill, plausibility and emotional strength in scenes lighted up with laughable displays of the amusing behavior of growing kids. The title role is carried with astonishing conviction by Donald Buka. All the others are good, too, especially a youngster named Michael Dreyfuss, last seen in, Listen, Professor, who has an uncanny ease and naturalness in his words and actions and is very, very funny.

I congratulate Lt. John Boruff, USNR, author of Bright Boy. I think he has a solid hit.

NEW YORK SUN
March 3, 1944

'Bright Boy,' Play of Prep School Life, Doesn't Sustain Early Promise

By WARD MOREHOUSE

WHEN the curtain fell upon the first act at Mr. Brady's Playhouse last evening the blight on the drama appeared to have been lifted; "Bright Boy" seemed a promising play. But during the second it began to fall apart and in the third it collapsed completely, leaving the audience as well as the young men of Brown Hall in great confusion.

Fascism again stalks the local theater. It comes in this time via a boys' prep school as Lieut. John Boruff, U.S.N.R., who has contributed previously to the Broadway stage, writes of a tortured, brilliant and ruthless student out to gain his ends, regardless of the means.

Allen Carpenter is the Bright Boy. He is a schemer, a cheat, a thief and a liar. In the beginning he is heartily disliked and is tossed into the lake. He decides to change his tactics, get himself popular and then take his revenge. He steals from the entire dormitory and becomes the money-lender. By connivance and machinations and his talent for mass appeal he gets himself elected president of his class, and efforts to expose him are useless. To his newly won followers, he can do no wrong.

"Bright Boy" has something of a preachment at the finish, and one involving democracy, faith, self-sacrifice, tolerance and a world-after-the-war note. But it ends hollowly and the author's message is not clear. By this time, too, the freshness has gone from the writing and the play has lost all of its early promise.

There are new faces, young new faces, in the cast, and there are moments when the play is well acted. Donald Buka gives a first rate performance and is particularly fascinating in his meaner, harder and more dangerous moods. Michael Dreyfuss turns in a good performance as Specs; so does Charles Bowlby, as the good boy, the doormat for the ruthless Allen. Ivan Simpson, returning from Hollywood, gives experience and mellowness to the role of Dr. Sewell, who seemed to make sense to the cast if not to the audience.

Arthur J. Beckhard's direction is spotty, but so is the script. You will behold few plays that bring together such a mixture of good and bad. The best of Lieut. Boruff's writing lies in his lighter touches. Watson Barratt's settings give the proper prep school atmosphere. Certainly you can never say that the scenic designers have been letting the season down.

"Bright Boy" opened cold, as we say in the theater. It might have been helped by out-of-town testing. It's a play that begins nicely but that gets away from its author, and badly.

NEW YORK TIMES
March 3, 1944

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Bright Boy"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

BROADWAY has had three new plays this week, the third swing having been taken last evening by "Bright Boy" at the Playhouse, and the latter now being out until week after next. The third try was somewhat different from the earlier two, although the final effect was much the same—leaving the state of the theatre about where it was. For Lieut. John Boruff, USNR, has written a story of prep school days which succeeds only in being somewhat sentimental in the wrong way, talky, anti-climatic and occasionally downright dull. He had an idea, to be sure, but the idea fled somewhere during the course of the evening, fled never to return.

• • •

The idea is to trace the course of a juvenile heel through his difficulties into reformation. Lieutenant Boruff's leading character is an arrogant young man who is disliked by his fellow students; having read Machiavelli, he decides to make them like him, deliberately cultivating friendship through various prep school schemes. Had the author allowed his Allen Carpenter to go along and grow up into a Pal Joey, he might have gotten somewhere; but serving the interests of humanity, he gives him a tender heart. The tough boy becomes a sentimentalist, which tough boys of the Sixth Form never used to do in the old days.

Surrounding his study of a bad character, Lieutenant Boruff has written some pretty stock material. There is the headmaster, who quotes the founding fathers and drags in Democracy more or less by the scruff of its allegorical neck. There is the genial teacher, plus the genial teacher's sweetergirl daughter. (Women being smarter about such things, the girl never falls for the heel, though she pretends to.) There also are the boy who wants to be an actor, the boy who is learning to smoke, the boy who is learning about sex. All of them talk a good deal, some of it being rather regal stuff.

Of the players, Ivan Simpson is the headmaster, giving a good-enough performance of a not unusual part; and Donald Buka is the student who reforms. Mr. Buka is properly sinister when the script calls for that characteristic, but when they begin changing the signals on him, he sometimes is thrown off. Charles Bowlby is the roommate, the good boy as opposed to evil, and Joyce Franklin is the only girl in the company. Arthur J. Beckhard has directed so that a fair number of people get at least one ride on fellow students' shoulders, that being an accepted form of prep school life. Class expelled.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
March 3, 1944

Broadway Goes On Staggering

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE north side of 48 St. is not at the moment my favorite part of town. Tuesday night it sponsored some extremely distressing goings-on under the title of *Mrs. Kimball Presents;* and Thursday night it was host to something not very much better called *Bright Boy.* The conspiracy in 48 St. is, of course, merely part of a larger plan to wreck the entire theatrical district; for it is now a month since any new play opened that rated house room in a barn.

Bright Boy is a story of prep-school life that forfeits its chances of being entertaining by trying to portray a mixed-up neurotic hero without knowing how. Allen Carpenter is a young man with a proud nature and a devious mind who wants desperately to lead and be liked. When his arrogance earns him a ducking in the lake, he sets up as a good fellow and to become popular even steals money from his classmates so he can generously lend it back to them. In time he becomes the idol of the school, at the expense of his manly young roommate, who alone sees into Allen. The whole psychological tangle gets tied in all kinds of knots in the course of a third act that practically refuses to end; but be it said that Allen's better angel triumphs.

• • •

Despite all the author's pains, however, the whole thing is so much hocus-pocus. Neither Allen's surface behavior nor his inner motives are made convincing and still less is his schoolmates' attitude toward him. What is worse, his behavior churns up nothing interesting; only the most banal and melo-dramatic kind of schoolboy agitation. The whole thing was much simpler, and went much faster, in the days of the Rover boys.

For, with the main characterization a flop, *Bright Boy* becomes merely a fancy juvenile, not worth a grownup's time. Lt. Boruff is often also unfortunate enough to write the kind of theme that makes you squirm. When he is content to go in for prep school roughhousing and adolescent bull sessions, he works up some tolerably interesting passages and an occasional funny line. But there are far too few of either.

As Allen, Donald Buka struggles with both an ill-handled and unsympathetic role, and can not be blamed for not shining at it. In more likeable parts, there are nice performances by John Cushman, William McGuire and others; while Charles Bowlby makes an engaging room-mate and Liam Dunn a credible schoolmaster.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
March 3, 1944

Adolescent Capers

By HOWARD BARNES

"BRIGHT BOY" makes the grievous error of trying to underline escapist entertainment with Significance. While celebrating adolescent capers in a boys' school, it would have one believe that the "Oh, gee!" "Oh, gosh!" youngsters were involved in a miniature representation of the current global struggle. There are even cosmic echoes in this new arrival at the Playhouse. John Boruff, a lieutenant in the U.S.N.R., has written his piece with obvious sincerity and traces of craftsmanship. He should have stuck to straight fooling.

• • •

For "Bright Boy" is at its brightest when it is dealing with the simple and universal

problems of growing up. The first act, for example, in which a knowing new boy at Brown Hall turns the tables on upper classmen has moments of genuine gayety. Even though some of the actors look a bit old to be shedding their short pants, they succeed in giving the work flavor and a bit of depth. Once the new boy is taking a cue from Hitler and almost getting away with his little Fascist plot, the offering becomes increasingly garrulous and preposterous.

• • •

Lieutenant Boruff has had enough past experience in the theater to keep his play from coming out entirely at the seams, but it is not a good job of tailoring. Before the second act is over, with the kid of the title pitted against his right-thinking roommate in a clash which involves prevarication, petty thieving and a fierce desire for revenge, the theme becomes hopelessly blurred. Before the ending, it is so badly out of focus that almost any climax would have sufficed to get the final curtain down. As a matter of fact, a headmaster who talks mystically about democracy, turns over an embittered young rat to a kangaroo court. Maybe prep schools are like that.

• • •

The acting is good when the script supports it. Donald Buka is excellent as the smart guy with Machiavellian notions. Charles Bowlby is not far behind him in the part of the honest youngster who teaches him an elliptical lesson about loving thy neighbor. Then there are such assorted school boy characterizations as those of Carleton Carpenter, Frank Jacoby, Beman Lord and Eugene Ryan to give the action fugitive accents of conviction. Ivan Simpson plays the head master ably, but it is a rather thankless role. Arthur J. Beckhard, co-producer and director of the enterprise, has acquitted himself rather ably. The trouble with "Bright Boy" is that it is neither funny enough as straight comedy, nor profound enough as a drama with a message to warrant serious attention.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
March 3, 1944

'Bright Boy' Sympathetic Story of a Scoundrel In a Prep School

By JOHN CHAPMAN

AMONG all the recent plays about youth, "Bright Boy" is unique. It does not treat sex as a subject for gags—in fact, sex is an extremely secondary theme; and in it nobody is pregnant or suspected of being so. "Bright Boy" is the story of a prep-school louse, and so much of it is so good that my obligation to report it is not good enough stirs rather deep regret.

John Boruff, now a Naval Reserve Lieutenant, has written with sympathy and insight the story of a sharp-witted lad with hate in his soul, who plays a lonely, mean game among youngsters who are not as quick of mind nor as devious of purpose as he. The innate decency of his mates, and of one boy in particular, finally crumbles his bitter, defensive cynicism, and the chances are that he may grow up to be a man of honor.

Third Act Falls Down

This change comes, of course, in the third act, and it is here that the play should be strongest, but isn't. It should pull you along with it at this point; but instead you find yourself trying to pull it along. You like so much of the play—its writing, its direction, the acting of several youngsters and one oldster—and you want to help it resolve itself quickly, dramatically and convincingly. But that third-act transition misses. It is not as clear and quick-moving, or as dramatic, as it should be, and in a situation like this the best-willed of audiences is helpless.

The bright boy in question is a newcomer to the school. A worldly fellow who has been parked around by careless and not particularly loving parents, he is more than equal to the pranks and innocent deceits of normal schoolboys. He is quickly marked no good and ducked in the lake, and a black and hateful scheme is born within him. He will become a pal, a good fellow, the class president—just so revenge will be sweeter when comes the proper time.

He steals from the dormitories—not to get money for himself, but so he can be a big-time Charley and lend to boys who are broke because they have been robbed. A brilliant student, he does everybody's home-work—out of contempt.

He has particular contempt for his roommate, an open-hearted lad who thinks ill of no one. He cannot understand how such a fellow should become popular, should also win prizes, should win the sweet interest of the headmaster's daughter where he, himself, has failed. Finally, though, he does understand and some notion of honor dawns within him. But it is a slow dawn and by now the audience is too far ahead and ready for home.

Donald Buka, as the louse, and Charles Bowlby, as his Galahad roommate, are very good. So is Liam Dunn as a wise and humorous old schoolmaster, and the young men in the surrounding cast are interesting and amusing. I noted the authoritative presence of Michael Dreyfuss, who was the pint-size Russian highbrow in "Listen, Professor," Joyce Franklin is the one girl in the outfit, and she's a nice girl.

Arthur J. Beckhard's direction matches Boruff's writing in sympathy, but seems unable to help the writing over the soft spots. The sets are by Watson Barratt.

"Thank You, Svoboda"

Comedy by H. S. Kraft based on John Pen's novel; directed by Mr. Kraft and Moe Hack; settings by Samuel Leve; presented by Milton Baron at the Mansfield Theatre, March 1, 1944.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
March 2, 1944

Thank You, Svoboda Lacking in Punch

By BURTON RASCOE

THANK YOU, Svoboda, which opened with considerable fanfare at the Mansfield last night, has so many (almost extraneous) good qualities—such as homely charm of setting, deft characterization and quiet, earthy humor—that it is saddening to report that it is almost entirely lacking in action or drama and, what is worse, it is essentially trivial and pointless.

I had imagined from what I had vaguely heard about the play that it was a satirical comedy dramatizing the cynical old adage, "It all depends upon whose ox is gored," which is a reflection of a distressing tendency of most people to become concerned with justice only when injustice has been inflicted upon them. Many a man who has thought that abstract principles of right were no concern of his has become a flaming avenger of wrongs when his own selfish interests have been threatened or invaded.

False Conception

There is, indeed, a faint sub-surface message to this effect in Thank You, Svoboda; but the satire and the irony implicit in the theme are so obscured by the false emphasis laid upon the endearing qualities of the central character that you have to read more into the play than comes across the footlights to get the satire and irony at all.

Some of the fault is the author's; but much of it, I am afraid, is the result of a false conception of the part by Sam Jaffe, the star of the play. Mr. Jaffe plays Svoboda from first to last as a lovable "character." If the part is to have any meaning, Svoboda must either be played as a stupid, insensitive, selfish clod and something of a scoundrel, incapable of doing a good deed except by accident or as a reflex action when his own petty interests are disturbed, or as a shrewd, wily peasant whose native wisdom is so subtle and devious that he is on the side of right from the first and only pretends to be a gullible dupe and victim of the agents of evil—in this case the Nazi invaders of Czechoslovakia.

THE CAST

Colonel Fiala	Arnold Korff
Mr. Vesley, his friend	Francis Compton
Josef, the innkeeper	Frank Tweddell
Doctor Burian	John McGovern
The German Salesman	William Malten
Svoboda	Sam Jaffe
Mr. Novotny, the lawyer	Donald Keyes
Mr. Hanoi, the banker	Len Mence
Mary, Svoboda's sweetheart	Adrienne Gessner
The Padre	John Ravold
Hugo, the engineer	Whitford Kane
Sergeant Kurtz	Ronald Telfer
Private Recht	Louis Fabien
Private Schmatz	Michael Strong
Private Langheld	Dehl Berti

I haven't read John Pen's novel, You Can't Do That to Svoboda, from which H. S. Kraft has derived this play; but I suspect that the novel was inspired by Jaroslav Hasek's The Good Soldier, Schweik, which is one of the greatest satirical novels ever written; and that both the novelist and the dramatist faltered in their inspiration and fell between the two stools of satiric comedy and of anti-Nazi melodrama.

In the play Svoboda is a "character," in a Czechoslovakian village, a good-natured, straight forward, illiterate porter of whom everybody in the democratic town is rather patronizingly fond. He has, rather inexplicably, never heard of Hitler until after he is sent to a concentration camp as the result of a confession he had signed, without knowing what it was, that he had been implicated in the blowing up of a bridge, which the Nazis had blown up themselves, as an excuse to occupy that part of the country.

Plan Is Anti Climatic

Before Svoboda is sent away he beats up a Nazi storm trooper for breaking a watch given Svoboda by his sweetheart, a widow who deals in junk and who found the watch in some refuse. For that deed he is unaccountably not held to answer; and when he is sent to a concentration camp he has a swell time there and emerges with fine clothes and more money than he has ever had in his life, because he has done the menial jobs required of other internees for small wages. When he returns to the village, he does so as a dude and prepares to marry when he learns that, in his absence, Hitler has confiscated the 300 kronen he had in the local bank. In revenge,

he blows up a bridge over which a Nazi troop train is passing. But his action is only a selfish satisfaction, motivated not at all by any perception of what it means that the Nazis have invaded his country and that his freedom is at an end

That's all there is to the story. Because the settings by Samuel Leve are excellently atmospheric and the acting is generally excellent, though desultory, you have, until the final curtain, a kind of tense expectancy that the first scene of the second act, and ends in triviality. . . . Adrienne Gessner, as Svoboda's something is going to happen. But nothing does. The play moves anticlimatically from sweetheart, was, I think, the star performer of the evening. The others were good, except Mr. Jaffe, who played his part, as he conceived it, very well indeed; but I maintain he has the wrong conception of it.

NEW YORK SUN

March 2, 1944

'Thank You, Svoboda,' Presented at Mansfield, Tedious and Unconvincing

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE war's impact upon Svoboda, village dolt and porter of a Czecho-Slovakian inn, his final awakening and his own retaliation against the Nazis in the role of saboteur—such is the subject matter of a tedious and faltering play, "Thank You, Svoboda," which Milton Baron brought last evening into the Mansfield.

H. S. Kraft, who has done previous writing for both stage and screen and who has taken a fling at producing in his odd moments, fashioned this new piece from the novel of John Pen and went about his job of dramatization with the feeling that there is a strong play to be given the theater from the revolt of the little people. There probably is, but Mr. Kraft's drama doesn't come off. It is more production than play.

The characters in "Thank You, Svoboda" are not sharply drawn and I found Svoboda himself, as played by the estimable Sam Jaffe, to be quite tiresome for most of the way. Of the players, Arnold Korff, as the aging military hero of the village, and Adrienne Gessner, in the role of the junk collector who takes Svoboda into her heart and home, are the most successful.

The play's locale is a Czechoslovakian village, untouched by war for many years. The time is March, 1939. The friendly inn is the gathering place of the banker, the lawyer, the doctor, and such. The peasant Svoboda, willing, accommodating and only half bright, has been about the inn for eighteen years. The Nazis move in and plunder the village. Svoboda is arrested on a false charge of putting dynamite under a bridge and is hustled off to a concentration camp. Returning later to the village and inn, he learns that the Storm Troopers have been murdering his good friends and have confiscated his savings. Well, the Nazis can't get away with it; they can't do that to Svoboda, who has worked all his life to horde his pennies. Now aroused, he takes matters into his own hands, turns saboteur in a big way, and blows up the bridge and a troop train.

"Thank You, Svoboda," as written by Mr. Kraft and as played by Mr. Baron's company at the Mansfield, provides heavy going for the greater part of the evening. Stage Nazis always carry a certain menace, but we've had more sinister groups than those that come to pillage this unnamed Czechoslovakian town. Dim-witted Svoboda is more than a match for the lot of them whenever he goes into action. The play's best moments, to my notion, are those when Svoboda and his middle-aged sweetheart are planning their marriage and their life together.

On the credit side, too, there are excellent settings by Samuel Leve. But they're wasted. "Thank You, Svoboda" is slow-moving and unconvincing. Something of an inferior "Moon Is Down."

THE NEW YORK POST

March 2, 1944

The Verdict: Thank You, Sam Jaffe—The Star Outcharms the Play

By WILELLA WALDORF

BROADWAY has already attempted to dramatize the Nazi occupation of Norway, France and Greece without marked success, and last night at the Mansfield "Thank You, Svoboda" went through some of the same motions in Czecho-Slovakia. H. S. Kraft, inspired by a novel of John Pen's, watches the arrival of Hitler's hordes through the innocent eyes of a simple-minded porter in a Czech village. It is an intriguing point of view and one that permits the introduction of more humor than is customary in these grim chronicles.

But, except for an appealing and often very entertaining characterization by Sam Jaffe as the illiterate porter who is far more afraid of catching cold in a draft than he is of the Nazis, "Thank You, Svoboda" runs through the by now very familiar occupation formula without managing to make you believe it any more than its predecessors did.

Jaffe Good As Usual

It is, of course, quite probable that most of the plays on this theme have been based on documentary evidence, and it is also undoubtedly true that far more shocking events actually took place when the Germans overran Europe than anything the playwrights have seen fit to picture on Broadway. But making them seem real in the theatre is another matter. John Steinbeck wasn't able to do it in "The Moon Is Down" and Mr. Kraft is no more successful in "Thank You, Svoboda."

As a character study in the gay and touching Sam Jaffe manner, the new play at the Mansfield is worth a visit, especially if you happen to have missed the other plays on the Nazi occupation. But Mr. Kraft has difficulty in getting his village characters—the doctor, the lawyer, the banker, the industrialist, the old Army man, the padre—established in his opening scene at the inn, and although Svoboda's reactions to the grey-clad soldiers are sometimes refreshing, the soldiers themselves are routine caricatures of German greed and deceit.

Village Types

In addition to Mr. Jaffe's portrait of a simple fellow so dumb they wouldn't even keep him in a concentration camp, there are good performances by Whitford Kane as an old army engineer who has taken to drink, Arnold Korff as a retired colonel who hates war, John McGovern as the village doctor and other local types. Adrienne Gessner acts the play's only feminine role pleasantly. Mr. Kraft's direction seemed rather obvious at times and the pace of the performance was uneven. Samuel Leve designed some atmospheric settings, notably the inn.

Our final impression of "Thank You, Svoboda" was something akin to the feeling we carried away from Mr. Kraft's "Cafe Crown" in which Mr. Jaffe acted an East Side busboy several years ago. The star is charming but the play is weak.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

March 2, 1944

'Thank You, Svoboda' Features Sam Jaffe

By ROBERT GARLAND

ONE more bit of theatrical shuteye came last night to Broadway. At the same time, it is another play misguidedly misdirected by its admiring author. This is "Thank You, Svoboda," a sort of tragic-comic revamping of John Steinbeck's "The Moon Is Down," fashioned by H. S. Kraft out of the John Pen novel, "You Can't Do That to Svoboda." You can't do that to Manhattan, either, Mr. K.

I don't **think** you can. For the incredible mixup at the Mansfield attempts to show how a small-town Czechoslovakian dumbbell outwits the invading Germans at every turn, works his triumphant way through one of the tougher concentration camps and returns to his native village to blow up a bridge and marry the lady junk-dealer of his dreams.

Come now, Mr. Pen, you novelist! Come now, Mr. Kraft, you dramatist! It can't be done. It most certainly can't be done up on the stage of a Broadway theatre. And, because it can't you—and I, gentlemen—don't believe in Svoboda and his anti-Teutonic goings-on. Moronic menials don't go around man-handling invading German troopers and live to laugh it off in cozy concentration camps.

Foolish Fellow

Not having read "You Can't Do That to Svoboda," the novel on which "Thank You, Svoboda" is founded, I wouldn't be surprised if the novelist set out to show that the Svobodas of this world are the common men, the little people who, by hook or by crook or by revolution, win out in the end. They always have; I believe they always will. But not if they are foolish fellows who know neither the "what" nor "why."

At the Mansfield, Svoboda is a foolish fellow who knows neither the "what" nor the "why." From first to last, he merely muddles through. As an innocent onlooker, it's my disconcerting feeling that it's his luck that is good, rather than his judgment. No turn of plot, no twist of situation, stems from the fellow himself. He owes everything to the playwright.

So Svoboda, a porter in an unpretentious Czechoslovakian inn, defies the invaders, revenges the looting of his watch, makes mock of a concentration camp, lords it over his less fortunate fellow villagers, blows up a nearby bridge with a German troop train on it and marries the junk-dealer of his choice by good fortune rather than by intelligence. Just between ourselves, I don't believe he knows what he is doing.

Kane Delightful

Earnestly, with all his might and mind, Sam Jaffe goes to work on Svoboda. My opinion is that he sees the character clearer than the playwright. It is also my opinion that the Svoboda of Mr. Jaffe, the star, and the Svoboda of Mr. Kraft, the dramatist, are not the same Svoboda. This may be why no three-dimensional Svoboda emerges from the actor-author-director combination. Only a figurehead!

Whitford Kane, the eternal First Gravedigger in the eternal "Hamlet," is the outstanding performer in Forty-seventh Street. As Hugo, a delightfully alcoholic engineer, he is merely that First Gravedigger in a not-too-Czechoslovakian disguise. One of the minor characters goes so far as to bring on a spade to prove it.

"Thank You, Svoboda" gets off to a septuagenarian start with a group of doddery old men doddering around a table, a lugubrious start from which it never manages to recover. Even Mr. Jaffe's Svoboda, ardently disagree-

ing with the playwright's, fails to enliven the piece perceptibly. Frankly, as a disappointed professional first-nighter, I have nothing much for which to thank Svoboda . . .

There's a certain something that makes the doubter drowsy.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
March 2, 1944

Jaffe, That's All

By HOWARD BARNES

THE thesis of "Thank You, Svoboda," is as clear as crystal. The acting is expert and explicit, with Sam Jaffe giving a superb portrayal of the fellow in the title. Since the physical arrangements of the new play at the Mansfield have been admirably designed by Samuel Leve, it has all the external manifestations of a stirring and ironical war play. Unfortunately, there is so little substance to the drama itself that the very simplicity of the production makes it a generally dreary entertainment.

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The show is a rather faithful dramatization of John Pen's novel "You Can't Do That to Svoboda," which related the slow awakening of a dolt in a Czechoslovakian village to the horror of Nazi occupation. H. S. Kraft has stated the theme with its essential meaning. He has attempted to suggest the satirical overtones which made the book something more than a stunt. But his playwriting is as heavy-handed as the original literary work was deft. My hunch is that the material should never have left the covers of a book.

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As it unfolds on the Mansfield stage, one is shown the railroad porter, Svoboda, saving his Czech nickels, having a pleasant romance with the town's lady junk dealer and avoiding drafts. When the Germans move in he is only concerned when one of them smashes his watch. When he is tossed into a concentration camp he makes money out of the ordeal. Not until he learns that his life's savings have been confiscated by the Nazis does he start a private underground movement of his own.

This simple narrative might possibly have inspired a forceful dramatic parable about the little John Smith, of mittel-Europa, who will take only so much pushing around. In the Sam Jaffe performance, the play sometimes captures a fine quality of pertinence and indignation. Too often it merely spins a sort of caricature of a folk tale in dull dramatic terms. You may be glad to see Svoboda discover what a fool he has been at the climax, but there are too few gladdening moments in the process of his conversion. While Jaffe dominates the action every moment that he is on stage, there are other good characterizations by Adrienne Gessner, as the junk woman; Arnold Korff, as a valiant patriot; Francis Compton and Whitford Kane. "Thank You, Svoboda" is well meaning and looks right, but it drags interminably.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
March 2, 1944

A Czech That Bounced Back

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

I'M TOLD that *You Can't Do That to Svoboda* was a pretty good novel; but *Thank You, Svoboda*, which has been adapted from it, is anything but a good play. On almost every count, indeed, it is an extremely bad one. This tale of a simpleton of a Czech porter who manages to have the last word against the Nazis altogether lacks credibility without even faintly making up for it in humor or charm. Its people are unreal; its situations are made undramatic; its dialogue, except for some mild comedy passages, is fibreless and flat; and the tone of the play wobbles grotesquely between the realistic and the almost-quaint. Mr. Kraft is decidedly not the man to portray resistance to the Nazis in terms of whimsy.

The story, which takes place a few months after Munich, tells how some German soldiers plant dynamite under a railroad bridge as a pretext for looting a village. Needing a culprit, they get the illiterate Svoboda to sign a confession and shunt him off to a concentration camp. Released from the camp, presumably because he is too much of a numbskull to seem dangerous, he returns home, and this time really blows up a Nazi train.

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This fairly astounding yarn goes all to pieces because, far from knowing how to involve Svoboda in drama, Mr. Kraft can't even bring him off as a "character." His agreeable stupidities, his love affair with the most scrubbed and tidy junk-picker ever portrayed, his bits of moron wisdom and unintentional wit, all seem highly contrived. Worse yet, because he can't read or write he is portrayed as though he can't talk: Mr. Jaffe spends the evening conversing in Me-Big-Indian-Chief fashion. His fellow townsmen are better at grammar, but no livelier at conversation. This is quite unfortunate since Mr. Kraft is all for having his characters talk rather than act, even to having them say the same thing many times over. When Mr. Kraft does face up to a dramatic situation, he completely muffs it. His Nazi scenes are among the silliest yet devised. Indeed, the whole play is silly. It throws no light on history and makes no sense as theater.

Though he has his moments, Sam Jaffe is not at his best as Svoboda; lacking a solid characterization to work with he over-exuberates in what there is and becomes a little tiresome. There are nice performances by Arnold Korff and John McGovern; and though not earthy enough by half, Adrienne Gessner is agreeable as the junk lady. Samuel Leve's sets are much better than anything that goes on in them.

THE NEW YORK TIMES
March 2, 1944

Sam Jaffe Arrives on Broadway as the Svoboda of 'Thank You, Svoboda'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

A FEW years ago H. S. Kraft was investigating a fabulous restaurant on Second Avenue, with Sam Jaffe to help him as the equally fabulous waiter of "Cafe Crown." Last evening the pair of them were together again, as the author and star, respectively, of "Thank You, Svoboda," which opened at the Mansfield. The sad note this morning is that the results of this second association have not been particularly successful; they do not measure up to their potentialities on paper. For the saga of Svoboda, in the terms of its current translation to the Broadway stage, is tedious and talky and lacks the characterization and also the charm of the original source.

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That source is, of course, John Pen's novel, "You Can't Do That to Svoboda." It is possible that no one could be better than Mr. Kraft in turning it to the stage; he, unfortunately, is the one who tried. Most of the action of the story takes place offstage, leaving the characters to tell about it—a matter which does not make for excitement. Moreover, the minor figures of the play become stock people, as though taken out of a drawer by label instead of having been created as individuals. And, finally, Svoboda, himself, is not well drawn; his motives are not clear. In the first act he is the stupid porter, but by the end of the second he has become almost a conscious comedian, and at the end of the third a very bright saboteur. The changes are abrupt and not fully explained.

Svoboda is the porter and handyman in a small Czech village at the time of Hitler's invasion. The townspeople give him old clothes for cleaning their chimneys and he has saved a bit of money. When the Nazis arrive, some of the soldiers steal from the villagers and, in an attempt to cover up, claim they have discovered an attempt to blow up a bridge over which Hitler's train is to pass. Svoboda, unable to read or write, is persuaded to put his mark on a confession and is sent to a concentration camp. Two months later he is released, after acquiring fine raiment for doing work for other prisoners, but when he gets back he discovers the German Government has taken his money. Svoboda decides to do something about it, starting with the bridge he had been accused of trying to blow up before.

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The evening is Mr. Jaffe's, inasmuch as he draws everything he can from the leading role, but even he is unable to give much definition to Svoboda as he reaches the stage. Arnold Korff, also a good actor, plays the role of Colonel Fiala, which is a lesser part in the drama than in the book. Adrienne Gessner is Mary, Svoboda's sweetheart. She is described as living in a shack at the edge of a junkyard, but on the stage of the Mansfield she obviously is quite comfortable and far above Svoboda. Francis Compton is Mr. Vesley, one of the villagers, and John McGovern the local doctor. And finally there is Whitford Kane as a drunken engineer who helps Svoboda with his plotting; Mr. Kane's part is small, but he does it well. Samuel Leve has provided some nice sets, even if Mary is dwelling in a minor castle.

Set down "Thank You, Svoboda" as the product of good intentions, even if not carried out successfully.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
March 2, 1944

'Svoboda' Gives Sam Jaffe Lots of Room for Character Acting

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"THANK YOU, SVOBODA" is funny, sometimes; once in a while it is mildly exciting, and now and again it has a friendly warmth. But too much of the time it seems too long for what's in it.

What's in it, principally, is Sam Jaffe having a character actor's honeymoon with himself. He is Svoboda, a dumb but winning tavern porter in a small Czech village the time the Nazis move in and take over. His Groucho Marx hair, his smile, his expressive widened eyes, his gestures, his carefully planned and skillfully executed bits of business—like making a production out of eating an apple—are all parts of a painstaking character portrayal.

He even has a dialect—whose purpose I could not quite understand. Here is Svoboda in his own land among his own people. All his own people talk their own tongue—which, in this case, is a fairly normal English. But Svoboda talks English like a Czech immigrant and it is sometimes reminiscent of the immortal "Me Nubi. Me good girl" line.

Finally He Gets Mad

Svoboda is an easygoing lug who lugs luggage, wears voluminous rags, has worked 18 years to save a fortune worth eleven dollars and some cents in U. S. currency, and

plans to marry a tidy little woman who deals in junk. German storm troopers take the village merely by moving in, indulge in petty thievery from house to house, kill one or two good people.

But none of this bothers Svoboda much. He gets angry for a moment when a Nazi breaks his treasured watch, goes doggedly about trying to get the man to pay up. Instead of paying up, the Germans hang a phony plot charge on him and ship him to a concentration camp. Svoboda, however, is so dumb and affable that even the Nazis tire of him and they ship him home in a couple of months—home in new clothes and with money he has earned working for other prisoners in the camp.

Even now the German world threat doesn't mean much to him. "Hitler?" he says. "I heard a lot of people saying 'Hello, Hitler,' but I never saw him." Only when he learns that the Nazis have seized his bank account to pay for his upkeep in the concentration camp does he get sore, and now he's really sore. He blows up a bridge. Thus, finally, a slow, honest, harmless chump becomes a patriot and a saboteur.

Adapted from Novel

H. S. Kraft adapted "Thank You, Svoboda" from a novel by John Pen titled "You Can't Do That to Svoboda." Mr. Kraft has directed his own play with more attention to fullness of character than to movement of plot, and most of his actors are interesting enough. Adrienne Gessner, ex-Viennese star, does very pleasantly by the one feminine role in the play.

Arnold Korff makes a quiet, firm impression as a dignified old Czech colonel and Ireland's Whitford Kane, who played a Greek guerrilla earlier this season in "Land of Fame," is now a Prager patriot helping Jaffe knock off a bridge. Mr. Kraft's German soldiers, I thought last night, are rather good because they are quietly, believably played and not the usual caricatures.

Samuel Leve's three settings—the tavern, the junk lady's home and a cell—are excellent.

"Mrs. Kimball Presents"

Comedy by Alonzo Price; directed by Mr. Price; settings by Cirker and Robbins. Presented by Ted Gerken and Joe Chandler at the Forty-eighth Street Theatre, February 29, 1944.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
March 1, 1944

Another Mishap

By HOWARD BARNES

ARTHUR MARGETSON and Vicki Cummings play a valiant game of battledore and shuttlecock in "Mrs. Kimball Presents." They toss lines around as though they really had some comic significance. When the dialogue peters out, as it frequently does, they race around the stage, pretending that they are performing in a play. Their most frantic efforts are not likely to make one believe that this Alonzo Price work is cut to any practical pattern of theatrical illusion. The only illusion that is evident in the new Forty-eighth Street Theater offering is that which the author and producers must have shared in thinking that it was even vaguely amusing.

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The fact is that "Mrs. Kimball Presents" is one of those ill-advised productions which tries to be both funny and satirical and winds up by being merely a trial for a rather competent company. Margetson knows his way around preposterous situations. He knows how to mugg a line into some semblance of slapstick nonsense. He and Miss Cummings are generally left kicking their heels ineffectually through the scenes of the piece. The Cirker and Robbins settings give plenty of scope for expedient exits, but featured players have to work, no matter how bad the production. Last evening, there were times when one might have given a friendly warning to the principals to get off stage and stay off.

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Whatever Price had in mind in writing his comedy, he has succeeded in veiling almost every humorous accent in the script. His fable about a couple of Hollywood hoboes, who establish themselves in a Sutton Place penthouse, get assignments in a hit show and extricate themselves from tiny predicaments, would have proved a rather dull plot with expert ministrations. As it stands, it is intolerably enervating. The tramp actors make good, of course, and so does their lady producer, but it is a rather frightful picture of theatrical doings that develops during the exposition.

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In support of Margetson and Miss Cummings are Michael Ames, who lounges around in the part of the leading man, after having conned his pal into a Man Friday role; Jesse White as a Hollywood scout, mistaken for a process server, and Bruce Evans, as a "press man." Price's name for press agent. They are as lost as their betters in a show which deserved next to nothing from its players. Chalk up another mishap for a season which is already studded with them.

THE CAST

Harold L. Burton	Arthur Margetson
Ambrose J. Piel Jr.	Bruce Evans
Jim	Hall Shelton
J. G. McGuire	Jesse White
Dick Hastings	Michael Ames
Cynthia Lane	Elizabeth Inglise
Babs Sloan	Joan Cory
Connie Kimball	Vicki Cummings

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
March 1, 1944

Mrs Kimball Presents Won't Be Here Long

By BURTON RASCOE

IN Mrs. Kimball Presents, a slight mistake which occurred at the 48th Street Theater last night, Arthur Margetson dodged Jesse White through two and a half acts under the delusion that Mr. White was a federal officer trying to nab him for passing a bad check. As it turned out, Mr. White was a representative from Paramount Studios who was trying to offer Mr. Margetson a seven-year contract, at $500 a week, to act in the movies.

For Mr. Margetson's sake I hope this latter contingency has a parallel in reality: for he didn't seem happy in his employment last night, and his present job looks, from here, as though it were exceedingly temporary. In fact, the play's chances are so slight that I feel no guilt about betraying the "secret" of the plot, as I have done above. For that comic chase is about all there is to Mrs. Kimball Presents.

All the rest is makeshift play-carpentry having to do with two indigent actors who have put up a bluff that has got them jobs in a play produced by a woman. Both of them mistake the woman's motives, the leading man believing her reasons for entering the producing field to be the mere whim of a wealthy widow, and his pal (who pretends to be his butler in real life as well as in the play) believing she has backed the show because of a sentimental interest in her leading man. Her motives are purely artistic and commercial.

Poor Direction

Alonzo Price is the author of the play. That, upon the evidence—because the comedy is listless and without novelty, wit or versimilitude—is bad enough. But Mr. Price made things worse by directing it. This is a double misfortune for the players (all of whom are experienced and competent and most of whom have appeared to fine advantage in other plays) because I feel sure that if they had been left to their own devices they would have enacted the play with more spirit and plausibility than they were directed to do by Mr. Price.

Obviously Mr. Price could not make up his mind whether his concoction should be played as straight comedy or as broad farce. The result is a disjointed performance. He will have two players using two different techniques in the same scene, one of them playing straight and the other using the tone and devices of low burlesque, or one playing a sentimental, romantic part and the other clowning.

Vicki Cummings, for instance, manages almost miraculously (considering her lines) to project realistically the quality of a shrewd, determined, very chic and pretty woman who nevertheless has a good business head and the background of a clever woman of the world. But only so long as she is vis-a-vis Michael Ames or Elizabeth Inglise, who also play their parts straight, if not exactly with a straight face. When Miss Cummings is opposite Mr. Margetson, Mr. White or Bruce Evans, her characterization goes to pot because they are required to act as though they were the Three Stooges in some laughless slapstick.

Set Tasteless

Mr. Ames, a handsome young actor recently seen to pleasant advantage in Storm Operation, can get his teeth into a role if he believes in it. Last night he showed plainly enough that he thought his part was very silly. He was awkward and embarrassed.

The one player in the whole outfit who was genuinely amusing was a young woman who has never been on Broadway before—Joan Cory, whose characterization of a wide-eyed, naive youngster was a delightful bit and all of it manifestly the product of her own personality and invention. Cirker and Robbins have designed and executed the most tasteless set of the season in what is supposed to be a very plushy and expensive apartment.

THE NEW YORK POST
March 1, 1944

'Mrs. Kimball Presents' Dismal Farce at the 48th Street Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

IMAGINE, if you can, what it would be like to see the book of a witless musical comedy performed without music, dancing or chorus girls and you will have a faint idea of what the audience at the 48th Street Theatre went through last night at the opening of "Mrs. Kimball Presents."

Thinking it over, the only favorable comment we can make is that it began late and

was over early. As the title suggests, it is a farce about a rich blonde who produces plays with handsome young leading men in them. The handsome leading man this time happens to be a fugitive from Hollywood. With him is a decaying ham actor also in financial difficulties.

Sutton Pl. Penthouse

On the theory that anything can be achieved in New York if you put on enough swank, they rent a Sutton Place penthouse, and the middle-aged ham plays butler to his younger friend.

Alonzo Price, who not only wrote but directed this dramatic atrocity, is an expert at the sort of dialogue that sounds like a broken-down phonograph record. It keeps getting stuck and playing the same speech over again.

At first we thought the actors were making it up as they went along, but it was soon evident that this was an insult to the company, which could doubtless have done far better if turned loose minus a script and permitted to improvise at will.

Small Type Only

The performance, naturally, was generally incredible and we are therefore mentioning the cast only in small type nearby, for the record, as Variety says.

According to the program notes, one of the actors has just emerged from three seasons with Olsen and Johnson in "Sons o' Fun." After a long stretch in such sane, restful surroundings, he must feel pretty bewildered at the goings-on in "Mrs. Kimball Presents."

THE NEW YORK TIMES
March 1, 1944

Another One

By LEWIS NICHOLS

CONTINUING its headlong investigation of how much the human nervous system can stand, the local theatre last evening offered "Mrs. Kimball Presents" at the Forty-eighth Street. In this one, Alonzo Price has whipped up a terrific witches' brew about actors and love; it has the bad features of truly bad plays, suitably performed. By the time the Messrs. Gerken and Chandler had allowed their curtain to fall on the end of the opening night, hardened citizens sat numbed in their seats, starry-eyed citizens had lost, perhaps forever, that 8:40 freshness. Not a happy evening at all, to look at the brightest possible side of it.

Mr. Price is telling of a couple of actors in a play which has just opened; they live in a penthouse where one pretends he is the butler. The producer is feminine, with curves, wiles and things, and when the actors aren't exerting their charms on her, she is exerting her charms on them. In either case there is a great deal of running around, a great deal of fumbling with cigarettes, champagne and a libelously strange man from Paramount, and a great deal of acutely silly talk. Michael Ames is the young actor, Arthur Margetson is the older actor, Vicki Cummings is the producer. It is quite safe to say none of them will list "Mrs. Kimball Presents" in their records of achievement for the Who's Who of future program notes.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
March 1, 1944

'Mrs. Kimball Presents' Wastes Time, A Theatre and Patience

By JOHN CHAPMAN

ACCORDING to the columnists, Broadway is a cynical cowpath bordered by knives in the back, and if you're going down you'd better take Sixth Avenue. This is either deliberate invention or epic stupidity, for Broadway, really, is an amiable, muddle-headed and terribly democratic locality which can welcome a play like "Mrs. Kimball Presents" without apologizing.

"Mrs. Kimball Presents" arrived last night at the 48th St. Theatre. Two people named Gerken and Chandler produced it and it was written by a character named Alonzo Price. The plot has something to do with a lady producer, a handsome actor in her employ, a nice little girl who is in love with the handsome actor, and a man who is masquerading as a butler for reasons which escape not only me but also the author.

It is not funny, this comedy; it is only a source of embarrassment if you happen to be a softy who keeps thinking of the actors on the stage who, with good will and with whatever gifts were bestowed upon them, stay up there pitching.

Broadway is not a complete pushover. In this area things do have to be pretty good to get by. But no place else will give so little so much of a chance. No other adult place would have given "Mrs. Kimball Presents" a premiere.

THE NEW YORK SUN
March 1, 1944

'Mrs. Kimball Presents,' Just a Mistake, Pauses at 48th Street Theater

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE drama famine at the 48th Street Theatre continues. The situation has now become downright alarming. For into this playhouse, as of last evening, there came a simple-minded comedy that makes its own valid claim to being the worst play of the season.

The title is "Mrs. Kimball Presents;" the author is Alonzo Price, an actor; the cast includes several players who ought to know better; and the management is the strangely hopeful and incautious firm of Gerken & Chandler. It's all a great mistake.

For the record, and certainly for no other reason, let it be said that this newest 48th Street transient concerns a wealthy woman who backs a show and two actors who hold forth in a Sutton Place penthouse. One of the pair, pretending to be a butler, is chased all evening by a snarling fellow thought to be a cop or a process server, but who turns out to be the bearer of a big Hollywood contract.

Arthur Margetson, Bruce Evans, Vicki Cummings and Michael Ames are among the Equity members unaccountably present in "Mrs. Kimball Presents." The author has done his own staging. The setting is by the long-established firm of Cirker & Robbins.

In seeing this new comedy you ask yourselves two questions: (1) How did it ever get produced and (2) once it was produced why didn't some one mercifully stop it during the week in Baltimore?

"Mrs. Kimball Presents" is another sad little knickknack that hasn't a chance to survive.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
March 1, 1944

Last Rites for 'Mrs. Kimball'

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

FEBRUARY 29 may come only once every four years, but in view of how Broadway chose to celebrate the occasion, it comes entirely too often. *Mrs. Kimball Presents* carries on handsomely right from where those two other little dragons—*Take It As It Comes* and *Right Next to Broadway*—left off, and it can't be long now before the Lunacy Commission takes a hand in the matter. This kind of behavior isn't usual even in May, when virtually anything can happen.

Mrs. Kimball Presents is, I suppose, a sort of farcical upheaval in which a number of characters take turns occupying the stage without remotely suggesting that they are part of a play. Mrs. Kimball herself is a wealthy, amorous lady producer with a yen for her handsome young leading man. He, however, has a girl of his own, which I wish he could have made clear to Mrs. Kimball while the evening was still young. There is also a third crucial member of the cast, an older man who poses as a butler, frantically dodges the cops, and winds up as a consolation prize for Mrs. Kimball. Should any of this resume make sense, it is purely accidental.

Mr. Price is beset by worse troubles than a plot that gives out before it ever gets going. His dialogue has the wormy comic charm of a high-school playlet, and when that too gives out, he just settles for letting people run around the stage. It is all very deplorable, and rather hard on the cast, which is not a very gifted one to begin with. Vicki Cummings plays Mrs. Kimball, and Michael Ames plays the handsome young actor, for about what they are worth; while Arthur Margetson, who should know better, wastes his time being the butler.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
March 1, 1944

'Mrs. Kimball Presents' On 48th Street Stage

By ROBERT GARLAND

STILL another on-stage calamity occurred last night hard by Longacre Square. The theatre was the Forty-eighth Street. The play—oh well, let it go!—was "Mrs. Kimball Presents." The producers were one Mr. Gerken and another Mr. Chandler. The author was Alonzo Price, who was also the director. The settings, about one and one-eighth in number, were designed and painted by Messrs. Cirker and Robbins.

And the net result was as calamitous as I have said, adding up to nil. If "Mrs. Kimball Presents" lasts overnight, I'll be surprised. "Victory Belles," "Hairpin Harmony" and "Right Next to Broadway" might just as well move over and make room for this new comedic casualty.

As far as I can see, "Mrs. Kimball Presents" has nothing to recommend it except, perhaps, the major setting, pretending to be a penthouse in Sutton Place, and Arthur Margetson, pretending to be an actor pretending to be an English butler. But, admiring penthouses, Sutton Place, Arthur Margetson and English butlers as I do, these are not enough to make the new arrival anything but a banality and a bore.

Penthouse Party

The Mrs. Kimball who "presents" is a society lady with a yen for the putting on of plays, a sort of high-brow, low-neck Cheryl Crawford who scores a knockout with her very first production. You meet her actors in their dressing-room after the first-night curtain has descended. Congratulating one another, they know they have been swell. Mrs. Kimball knows it, too. They've no need to wait for morning papers.

So Actor Dick Hastings, her really lovely lead, and Actor Harold L. Burton, Dick Hastings' definitely British pal, put on a party at the Sutton Place penthouse they so wittily refer to as "Bachelors' Hall." The party is in honor of Mrs. Kimball, the only and honored guest.

Now it seems that Dick is engaged to a young Park Avenue personage called Cynthia; that Mrs. Kimball also has her eye on him; that Harold L. Burton isn't all he pretends to be; that a bad check has been passed; that the rent of the penthouse has not been paid; that a mysterious stranger in a slouch hat is

on the trail of the aforesaid Harold; that Mrs. Kimball is a producer with extra curricular ideas of her own.

That Is That

That being that, those being those, the hard-put players at the Forty-eighth Street struggle manfully to make the play seem reasonable, the dialogue sound human. It can't be done! It would have been better if the author, Alonzo Price by name, had given the actors an idea of his intentions and let them make the whole thing up as they went along. He didn't, worse luck, and the news today is bad.

Arthur Margetson is out of luck as the English butler who isn't an English butler after all. Even getting entangled with a card-table, a prop chicken and a bottle of ersatz champagne helps him not at all. Quite visibly he knows it, playing with obvious disinterest.

Michael Ames, a refugee from Maxwell Anderson's "Storm Operation," has an equally unrewarding time as the play-within-a-play's handsome young leading man. Vicki Cummings, recently returned from "an extensive tour of the country in such dramatic staples" as "Personal Appearance," "Yes, My Darling Daughter" and "Kicked Upstairs," is blonde and come-on-ish as the "presenting" Mrs. Kimball . . . Today's answer is "No!"

"Right Next to Broadway"

Comedy by Paul K. Paley; directed by William B. Friedlander; settings by Karle O. Amend. Presented by Mr. Paley at the Bijou Theatre, February 21, 1944.

THE CAST

Sam	Rubin Goldberg
Audrey	Gloria Mann
Marian	Dorothy Eaton
Jerry	Roger Sullivan
Dotty	Frances Tannehill
Poppa Weinstein	Leon Schachter
Charlie	Joseph Leon
Lee Winston	Jeannette C. Chinley
Carlo Marchetti	James Russo
Ben	Tom Daly
Irwin Cole	John Baragrey
Gertie Smith	Cleo Mayfield
Danny	Lee Bergere
Mr. Loucheim	Norman H. Miller
Charles Bradford Ramsey 3rd	Jack Bostick
Moskin	Jonathan Harris
Boskin	Charles Cohan

NEW YORK POST
February 23, 1944

'Right Next to Broadway' Opens—But Doesn't Get Laughs Wholesale

By WILELLA WALDORF

"RIGHT NEXT TO BROADWAY," the new comedy by Paul K. Paley which opened at the Bijou Theatre on Monday night, is certainly no masterpiece of playwriting, but it does shed a certain amount of light on the complicated inner-workings of the wholesale dress business.

We have long wondered how some of the weird-looking garments displayed in the shops from time to time ever came into being, and after sitting through "Right Next to Broadway" we are beginning to understand. If this is a true picture of what goes on in the ladies' ready-to-wear district, it is surprising that the sights one occasionally sees in the shop windows aren't even more debilitating.

Paul K. Paley, who wrote and produced "Right Next to Broadway," apparently has obeyed one of the cardinal rules of play writing, i.e., he has selected a subject he knows intimately. Taking as his background a wholesale dress firm founded by "Poppa" Weinstein, he has tossed together a farce about what goes on there under the direction of Poppa's daughter, Lee Winston, who once studied art in Paris and now designs super-frocks for the trade at $16.75.

Women's Wear Expert

Miss Winston's artistic temperament interferes somewhat with her efficiency as a boss manufacturer who, it seems, must not only keep a stern eye on sales but maintain cordial relations with the needle-workers, deal diplomatically with representatives of the union, endeavor to observe vague government war-time regulations regarding the use of cloth, and try to restrain Poppa from running off to Niagara Falls with one of the models.

As if this weren't enough, Seventh Avenue's rising young authority on what American women will wear is confused in her mind over whether she loves a two-timing young man who also studied art in dear Paree, or the less thrilling but indispensable head of her sales force.

This may sound like sufficient material for a three-act play, but it isn't. Mr. Paley musters just about enough laughs for a mild one-act sketch. His situations, some of them basically sound as farce, are all too long drawn out and he has a tendency to introduce his characters one after another on the "Good morning, everybody," style that may be realistic enough but makes for monotony on the stage.

Farce-Making Not Easy

The love interest is handled with a naivete matched only by that in "Lady in the Dark," which it faintly resembles.

Doubtless there is room for a farce about the ladies' garment business on Broadway, but it will have to be done by someone more skilled at farce-making, in the manner of George Abbott or the redoubtable George Kaufman, to demand attention in this streamlined era. Even Mr. Abbott and Mr. Kaufman sometimes fall lamentably at this difficult game, so it is hardly surprising to find Mr. Paley, a beginner, none too adept at it.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
February 22, 1944

Grim Goings-on In 45th Street

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THE theater suffered a painful concussion Monday night, when Seventh Avenue collided with Broadway. Mr. Paul K. Paley had prepared for the public gaze a comedy about the garment industry, and as soon as I have written a few more sentences I am going to try to forget about it forever. Despite *Hairpin Harmony* and other strong contenders, *Right Next to Broadway* is by no means out of the running for the season's booby prize.

For, among other things, *Right Next to Broadway* managed to be almost a worse production than it is a play. Only by a technicality can what went on at the Bijou be called acting. Under Mr. Friedlander's direction, a great many people spoke and shouted their lines so as to get every last ounce of badness out of them.

For the record, the play itself deals with the troubles that beset a woman dress manufacturer. Her creditors harry her. The WPB hamstrings her. The union, in the person of an incredible burlesque of a radical, dictates to her. And to top it all, she falls in love with a heel. She herself, however, is so bad-tempered and arrogant that no one can sympathize; and the play is so incredibly childish and completely unamusing that no one can care.

NEW YORK TIMES
February 22, 1944

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Right Next to Broadway"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

"RIGHT NEXT TO BROADWAY" opened last evening at the Bijou, which indeed is right next to Broadway, but thereafter any connection with events normally taking place in a theatre ended abruptly. For in writing his play, and presenting it, Paul K. Paley stirred memories only to groping for the time there had been anything quite like it; Times Square's latest is not the worst play ever produced, but it is in there trying. Silly, with an almost morbid sense for awkwardness and cliché, it is alike badly acted and badly directed. During the intermissions the curbstone gossip was whether to go home or stay. Some did one, some the other.

The street next to Broadway is Seventh Avenue, where they make dresses, go into bankruptcy, have dates with models and fall in love with a strange assortment of people. No doubt Seventh Avenue is peculiar, but it holds the reputation of being alive, which is something you wouldn't learn from Mr. Paley. A cast headed by Jeannette C. Chinley, Frances Tannehill, Leon Schachter and Tom Daly looks as though its members wished they were doing other things. Actors usually know about such matters.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
February 23, 1944

If You Like Hot-Foot You'll Take to This One

By BURTON RASCOE

AN acute embarrassment afflicted the immaculate and inoffensive Bijou on Monday night. The occasion was the perpetration there of a crude practical joke on first nighters, entitled Right Next to Broadway, by Paul K. Paley, an author-producer with an aberrant sense of fun. It was as enjoyable as being given a hot-foot.

It takes 17 actors to work Mr. Paley's shenanigan. Soon after the curtain goes up they begin bounding onto the stage, one by one, bawling "HEL-LO, every body!" and smiting their hands. As fast as one disappears another one pops in. They keep this up until you can hardly bear it, and then Mr. Paley throws in his smackeroo—a reference to Errol Flynn. He thinks that is so good he uses it about a dozen times. . . . That should give you an idea of the setup. Don't say I didn't warn you.

The plot purports to delineate the inside workings of the ladies' wholesale garment business, whose center is Seventh Ave., just off Broadway and south of Times Sq. The troubles appear to consist of bedevilment by young squirts out of law school, armed with OPA directives and bales of questionnaires; the garment workers' union with Communist grievance committees acting like commissars and making impossible demands; temperamental cutters, and out-of-town buyers, male and female, who are bibulous and erotic and whose orders mainly depend upon how their primary requirements are satisfied.

Ineffective Staging

Such material, treated with skill and imagination, might conceivably be worked into an entertaining and even an instructive play. But Mr. Paley betrays no evidence of possessing an iota of skill or of imagination. Nor does William B. Friedlander, the director, seem to know anything whatever about staging a play.

Although it is probably something they will soon wish to forget, the players mixed up in this affair are Rubin Goldberg, Gloria Mann, Dorothy Eaton, Roger Sullivan, Frances Tannehill, Leon Schachter, Joseph Leon, Jeannette C. Chinley, James Russo, Tom Daly, John Barangrey, Cleo Mayfield, Lee Bergere, Norman H. Miller, Jack Bostick, Jonathan Harris and Charles Cohan.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
February 22, 1944

Neither Stout Nor Stylish

By HOWARD BARNES

THE cloak-and-suit trade, as nearly every one in the cast of "Right Next to Broadway" remarked last night, is a crazy business. If it really is it should have inspired far more comical nonsense than may be found on the stage of the Bijou. This Paul K. Paley play is incredibly dull. It takes up various aspects of a dress factory with such ponderous and pointless emphasis that it becomes an outstanding choice for the dreariest offering of the current season. Mayor LaGuardia and Grover Whalen should see to it that a leading New York industry gets a better break at the hands of the drama.

* * *

The chances are, of course, that the making of clothes offers no better background for theatrical embellishments than any other business. Those in the know about skimping on a dress by cutting it on the bias, or handling labor union committees and W.P.B. agents, will undoubtedly get a slight kick from the documented plot of the author. They can scarcely derive much amusement from the torpid lines and stock situations which bind the production into what passes for a show. The garment center has frequently played flame to a playwright moth, but rarely so cruelly as it has in this instance.

* * *

Paley plunks from the start on the supposed color and excitement of his milieu. Since he never integrates a reasonable human fable in his exposition it never makes any sense as drama. There is an harassed young lady who runs a factory and designs dresses. There are an elderly manufacturer and a buxom model, who rush off in the heat of the day and get married. There are several assorted caricatures. All in all there is a minimum of solid characterization or writing craftsmanship in "Right Next to Broadway."

* * *

There is no earthly reason why the piece should have been well performed. If Jeannette C. Chinley, as the bedeviled designer, leaves much to be desired and such assistants as Gloria Mann, Frances Tannehill, Leon Schachter and Tom Daly wander around the Bijou stage as though they were trapped, blame it on Paley, who has produced his own accolade to the cloak and suit trade. William B. Friedlander's direction is indifferent and even Richard Maney's program notes do little to relieve the tedium of a bad evening in the theater.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
February 23, 1944

Schmoosing

By ROBERT GARLAND

YESTERDAY afternoon, at the handsomely refurbished Bijou, I, at long last, came upon the play that should have had "The Voice of the Turkey" as a title. Alas and alack, it hasn't. Instead, it is known as "Right Next to Broadway." For worse, rather than for better, it is presented by the Paul K. Paley who made it up out of his own head, and, I suspect, as his actors went along. It reminds me of "Potash and Perlmutter" without either of the boys.

The words "right next to Broadway" refer to Seventh Avenue, between the station known as Pennsylvania and the square known as Times. There flourishes the garment industry. And there, like it or leave it, wilts Mr. Paley's play. The most extraordinary unpalatable people enter and exit at the most uncalled-for intervals, waving their hands and their ladies dresses in the air as they speak Mr. Paley's incredible lines and work their woe-begone way through Mr. Paley's incredible situations.

"Schmoosing," a fellow firstnighter called it. Whatever it is, it most certainly doesn't belong on Broadway. Or even right next to Broadway, if you ask me! So let me tell you that it is acted for all it is worth—well, then, almost all it is worth—by a group of mediocre mummers headed by a refugee from the radio studios called Jeannette C. Chinley. Up to now, Miss Chinley's best known role is that of one Margaret Submit Quimby. This may give you some idea.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
February 22, 1944

'Next to Broadway' Is Dismal

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"RIGHT NEXT TO BROADWAY" means Seventh Ave. Seventh Ave. means the garment district. The garment district means standing in knots or walking slowly up and down during lunch hour, schmoosing. Schmoosing means indulging in small talk about the garment trade.

"Right Next to Broadway," a comedy by Paul K. Paley, was presented by Paul K. Paley last night at the Bijou Theatre. It might be schmoosing, for it concerns the dress manufacturing business; but it certainly isn't a comedy. It isn't even a play. I doubt, even, that it would interest the specialists and experts who work on Seventh Ave. and its side streets.

About Love Trouble

The plot is something about Jeannette C. Chinley, a gal who takes over her old-line father's business and gives it a hypo because she is an inspired designer. She runs into love trouble, which is settled before the evening is over. She also runs into manufacturing trouble, which is settled only after we are told how models, office boys, cutters, unions and the OPA operate in the garment industry. Now that I know, I find I don't care. The acting is nothing special.

If Mr. Paley wants to brighten the prospects of the little number he has run up, he might take advantage of the address—the Bijou Theatre—and change his title to "Right Next to The Voice of the Turtle."

NEW YORK SUN
February 23, 1944

'Right Next to Broadway,' New Comedy, Is at the Bijou—but Not for Long

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE theater will know some strange and woeful evenings as the spring season gets into its stride, but surely the worst is already over. That happened Monday evening when "Right Next to Broadway," a comedy which Paul K. Paley wrote, believed in, and produced, opened at the Bijou. It's awful.

Now, it's every man's privilege to write himself a play and Mr. Paley, a certified public accountant, who has been close to the garment trade, set about to do so. But those of us present at the Bijou premiere are still asking ourselves how such a piece as "Right Next to Broadway" ever found its way into a New York theater. Surely it's a trick if you can do it, and Mr. Paley did.

The cast is about as hopeless as the play. But every now and then you got the feeling that Jeannette Chinley, in the role of a dress designer running a dress factory and having a time with labor problems and the WPB, showed signs of capability and has an attractive voice. There were a few seconds during a telephone conversation when she actually had the audience listening. Tom Daly, as a loyal associate, gives indication of being a professional actor. The handsome Frances Tannehill needs a part and a director.

There have been numerous plays of the cloak and suit world, of the garment industry. There was one, "Lombardi, Ltd.," which was a lively hit. But in "Right Next to Broadway," a dismaying and unblushing gimcrack of life along Seventh avenue, the theater strikes bottom.

The actors in "Right Next to Broadway" do a lot of yelling and a lot of walking. They're forever marching on stage and off. One of these nights, if they get to thinking it over, they'll walk right out of the Bijou and never go back.

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